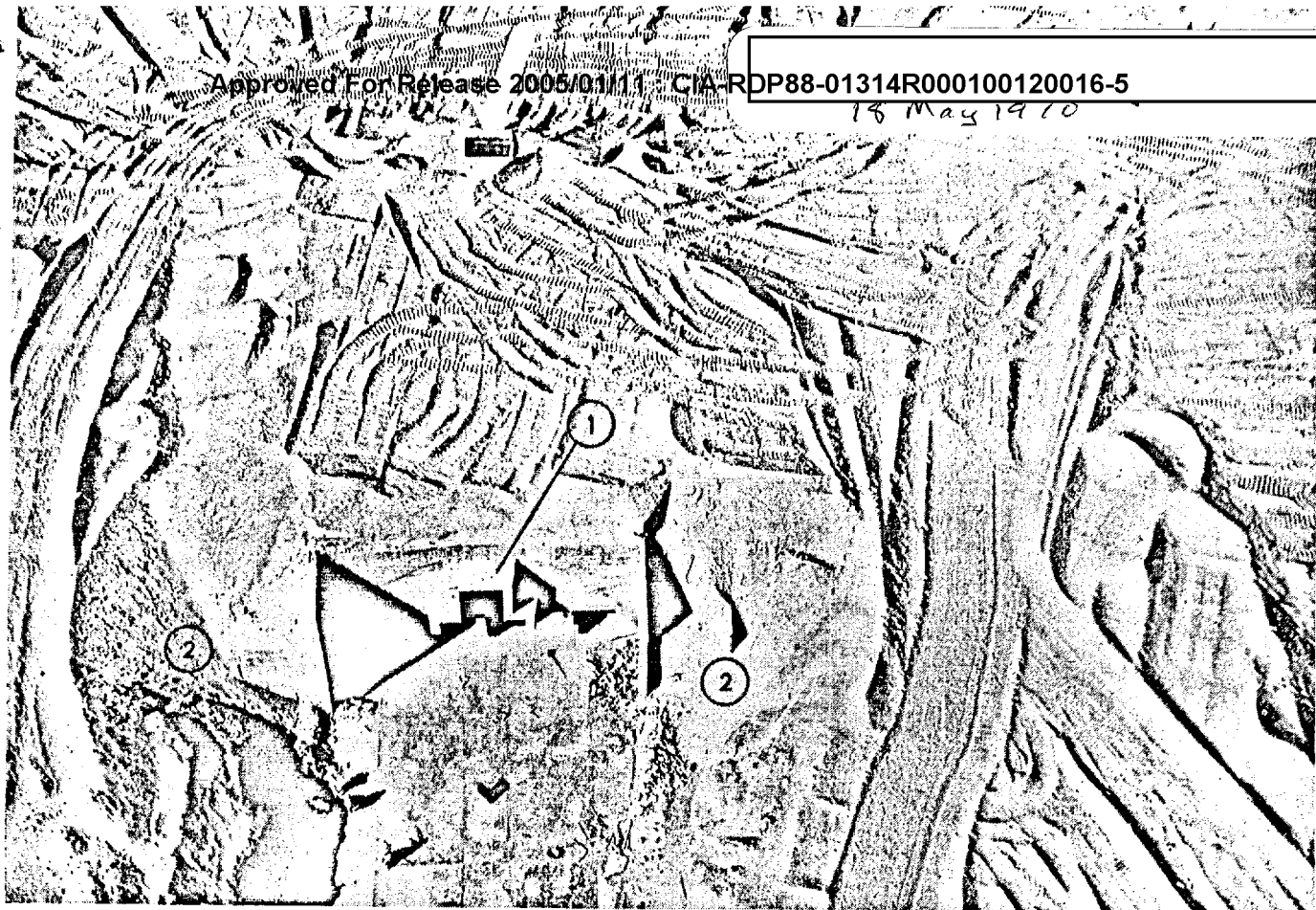


18 May 1970



Construction is nearly completed on an aircraft shelter at Inchas airfield about 30 mi. northeast of Cairo. Shelter opening (1) is designed to accommodate high tail and shoulder wing of the MiG-21J interceptor. Ancillary structures (2) are being covered with sand. Note ventilation duct (arrow). Airfield is one of three in Egypt controlled by Soviets.

Soviets Accelerating Mideast Drive

By Edward H. Kolcum

Geneva—Soviet Union is accelerating its massive penetration into the Middle East and employing strategy designed to give it control of the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and ultimately the oil-rich, defenseless states that border the Persian Gulf.

At the same time, Russia has started to court Libya directly with the objective of torpedoing the French sale of 108 Dassault Mirages to that country. In this move, Russia has the strong support of Egypt, Libya's eastern neighbor.

The feverish burst of Soviet activity is being viewed in Europe as a clever exploitation of the internal dissension in the U.S. triggered by President Nixon's controversial Cambodian campaign. While America, and much of the remainder of the western world, is engrossed in the U.S. domestic turmoil and events in Southeast Asia, Russia has been able to accelerate its Middle East timetable by:

- Taking over the complete operation of three Egyptian military airfields and controlling three others (see map, p. 17).

- Selling Libya 25 MiG-21 Mongol trainers.

- Increasing the number of seasoned airmen and ground troops in Egypt to 15,000. Another 5,000 Soviet civilian technicians and advisers are in the UAR.

- Delivering 80 low-level surface-to-air SA-3 Goa missile launchers and 160

Goa missiles to Egypt.

- Constructing 15 T-shaped Goa concrete-shelter sites along the entire 109-mi. length of the Suez west bank. Sites are being built at standard 7.5-mi. intervals along the Suez narrows. This interval allows a range overlap for the SA-3s, providing a serious potential threat to low-level Israeli strike missions against massed Egyptian artillery emplacements along the west bank. The Goas probably will be manned by Russian military personnel.

- Deploying four Tupolev Tu-16 strategic reconnaissance aircraft to Aswan, from which they will keep watch on the Red Sea.

- Stationing a picket destroyer off the Sinai coast to furnish early warning data to Egypt of Israeli air activity.

- Increasing air- and sea-lift between Russian and Egyptian ports to the point

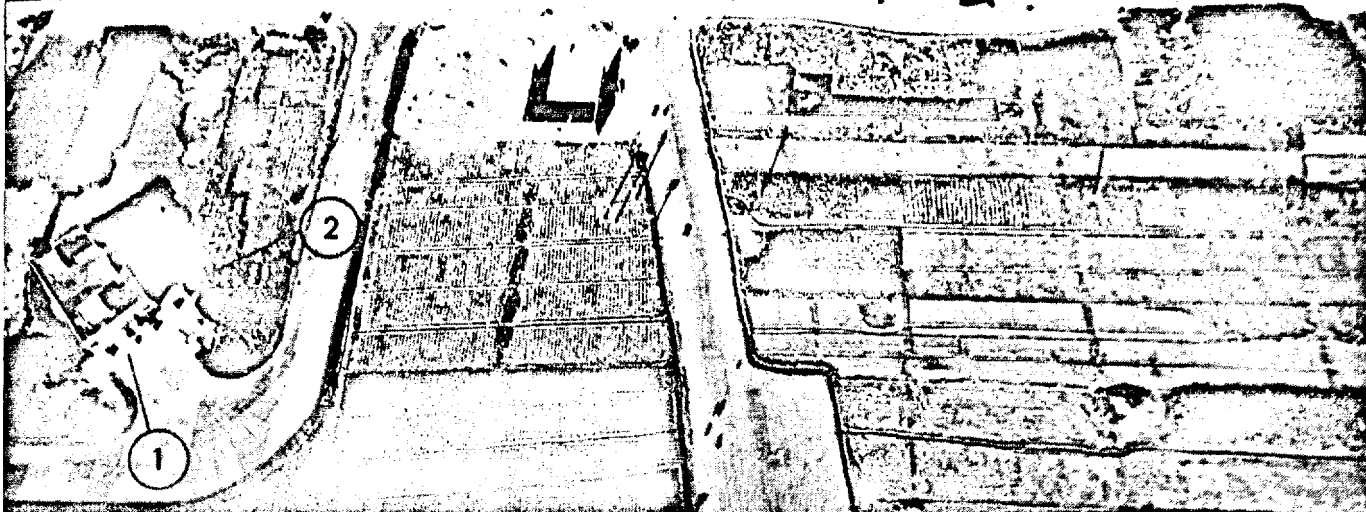
where deliveries now are at the heaviest pace since the end of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

A new intelligence assessment is that Russia will bring a total of 150 MiG-21J interceptors and 250-300 interceptor pilots into the UAR to defend the country's interior. Three airfields now completely under Soviet command and control are at Inchas, 30 mi. to the northeast of Cairo; Jiyanklis, 70 mi. to the northwest of Cairo, and Al Mansura, 70 mi. north of the UAR capital. Russian pilots also fly from Beni Suef, Cairo West and Aswan. They probably control these bases, but Egyptians also fly from them.

Soviet aircraft are protected by camouflaged shelters at all bases. There are about 450 hardened shelters in Egypt.

In addition to interior air defense of Egypt and reconnaissance of the Red Sea, Russia also conducts routine reconnaissance of the U.S. 6th Fleet and the Mediterranean, using seven Tu-16s, with Egyptian markings but flown by Russian crews (AW&ST Mar. 30, p. 16).

The 15,000 uniformed Russian air-

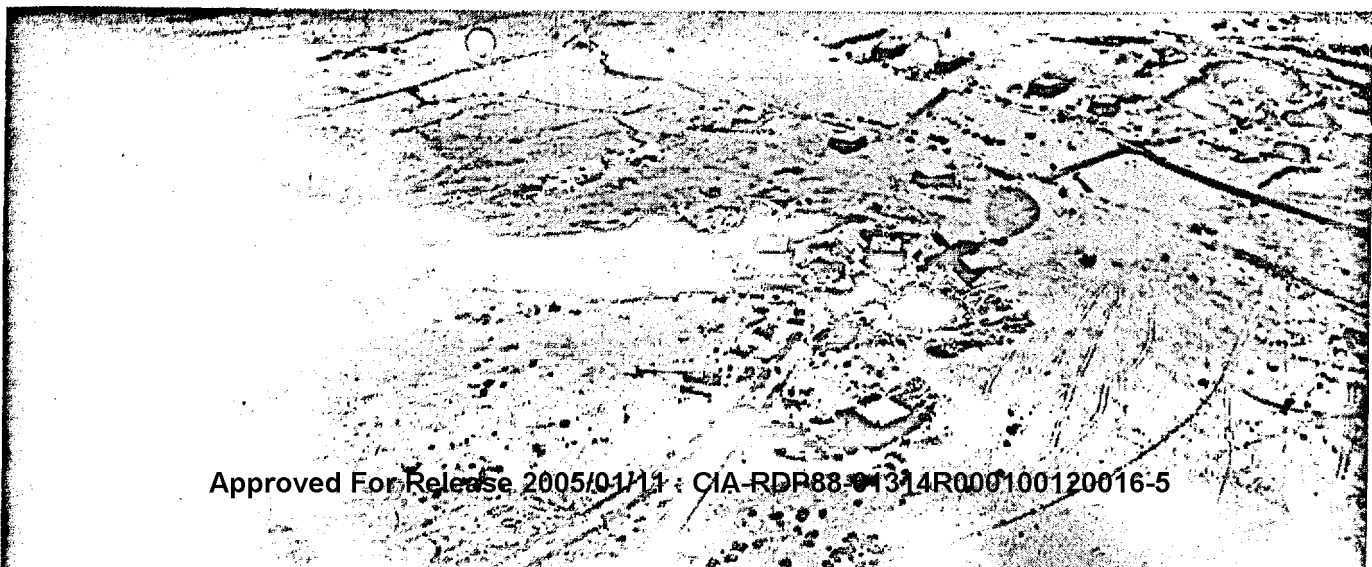


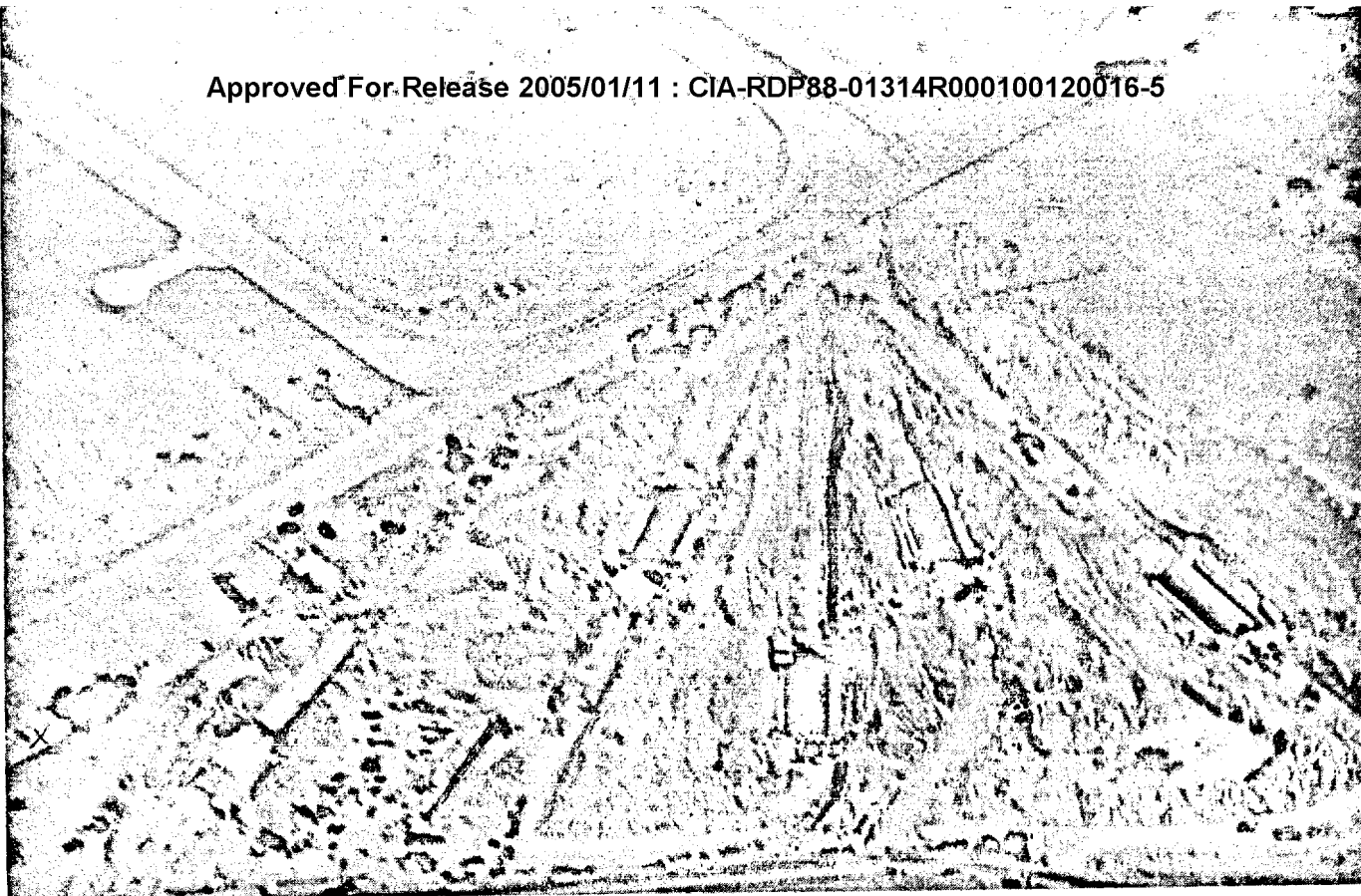
Camouflaged hangar structures at Egyptian airfields are shown in these photos. Located just off the Cairo-Alexandria highway (above) is a camouflaged hangar (1 and 2) for either MiG-21 or Su-7 aircraft. Marks on the highway (arrow) are aircraft stop-start marks. Structures on hangar roof are

anti-aircraft artillery positions. Jiyanklis airfield, (below), about 70 mi. northwest of Cairo, is a MiG-21J base operated by the Soviets themselves. Five double-bay and four single-bay hangar structures are located in the foliage in the center of photo. Soviet pilots also fly from five other Egyptian airfields.

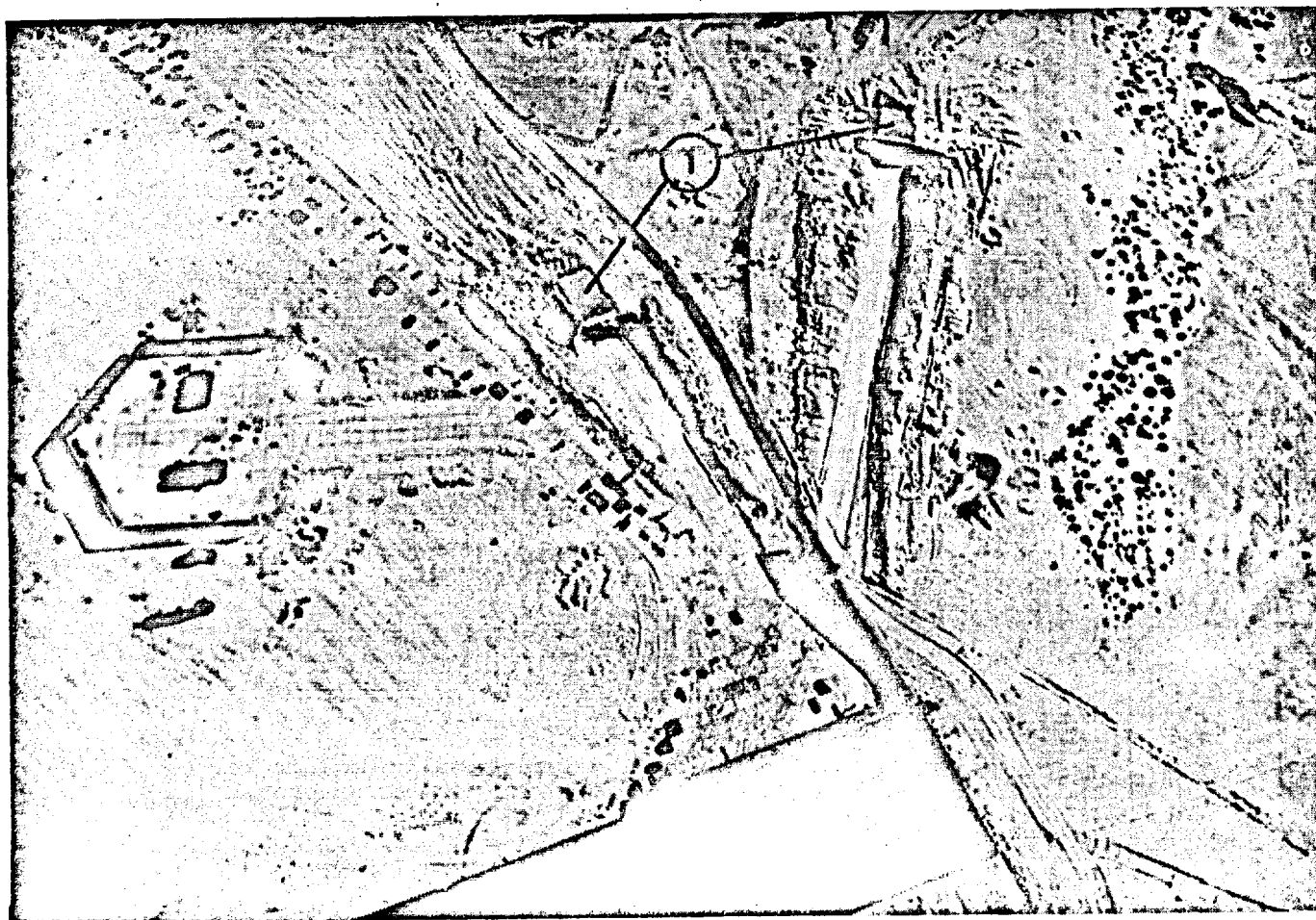


Taxiways leading to a complex of hangar structures at an airfield in Egypt are seen in aerial reconnaissance photo (below). Hangar structures are built of reinforced concrete to prevent a recurrence of events in the Six Day War when most of the Egyptian air force was caught on the ground and destroyed. When construction is finished, hangar structures will be covered with sand for protection.





Hardened aircraft shelters in early stages of construction are seen at Inchas airfield, which has been taken over by Soviets flying MiG-21Js. Shelters, similar to ones in Warsaw Pact countries, will be covered with sand and camouflaged.



Single-bay concrete shelters at Cairo West airfield, Egypt's largest military airfield, (1) are being covered with sand. Fuel trucks are parked in the hardstand protected by revetments (left). Dark strip at bottom of photo is end of runway. Cairo West is one of six airfields in Egypt from which Soviet pilots fly. Egyptian air force also uses it.

men and troops in Egypt are responsible not only for operating and maintaining MiG-21J interceptors and Goa missiles, but also for manning and maintaining associated search radars and the artillery defending the missiles and radar. Russia has deployed two low-level radars to Egypt. They have the code names Low Blow and Flat Face. The 23-mm. anti-aircraft artillery used for defense is radar controlled.

Russian flying elements in Egypt are organized into 12-aircraft units. Three such units, with 36 aircraft, form a fighter regiment. The entire Soviet interceptor fleet in Egypt goes on alert whenever Israeli aircraft penetrate UAR airspace.

New equipment delivered to Egypt in recent weeks also has included 16 additional Sukhoi Su-7 fighter bombers. This brings to 86 the number of these strike aircraft in Egyptian hands, and the new deliveries indicate that Egypt intends to increase its air pressure on the occupied Sinai.

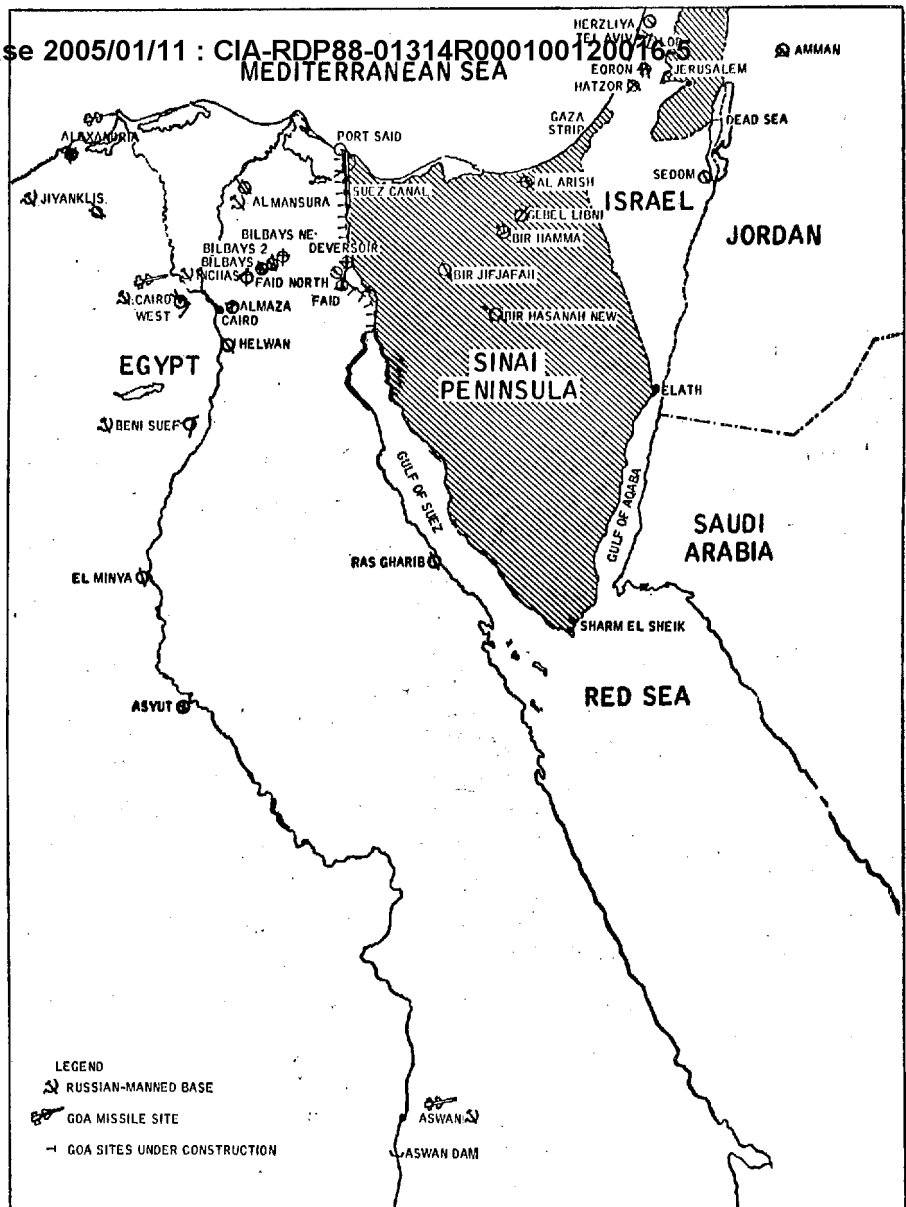
As of late last week, Egypt's tactical combat air fleet also consisted of 55 MiG-21Cs and 44 MiG-21Ds. The UAR also has 73 tactical helicopters—mainly the Mil Mi-1, -4, -6 and -8.

In Russia's Middle East and North African penetrations, Egypt has been the strategic pivot point. There is a new fear that Egypt is convincing Libya to back out of its deal with France to buy Mirages. The rationale for this is that 25 Mongol trainers have been delivered to Egypt, which does not need them. They are apparently awaiting further shipment to Wheelus Air Base when the U.S. completes its withdrawal from this base June 30. Egypt and Libya will establish a master Arab air training center and air academy at Wheelus when the U.S. leaves (AW&ST Mar. 23, p. 14).

French sources dispute the conclusion that Libya is about to default on the Mirage deal and say that first deliveries will be made on schedule next January and February. They point out that Libya already has lost \$80 million by canceling the missile air defense package with Britain. It is estimated that Libya has paid at least \$30 million down on the \$400-million Mirage deal, which includes spares, training and maintenance as well as the 108 aircraft.

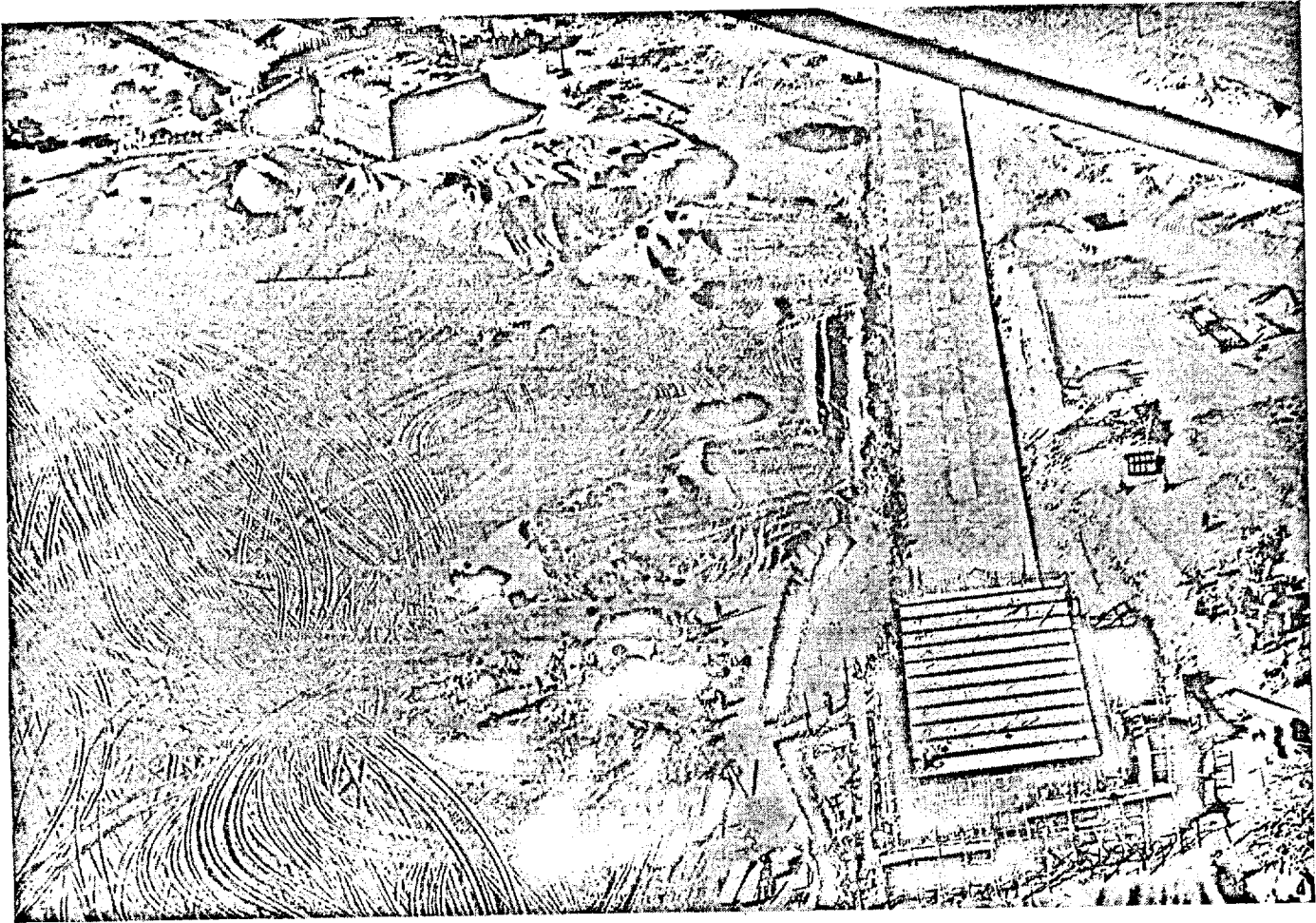
Oil looms ever larger as the major strategic and economic factor behind Russia's Middle East and North African push (AW&ST Mar. 30, p. 9). Although the Persian Gulf states have largely been overlooked by intelligence experts as a Soviet goal, the departure of Britain from the five states there makes the area highly attractive at minimum risk.

Britain will begin its East-of-Suez withdrawal this summer and complete it by the end of next year. This will leave the wealthy states of Bahrain,

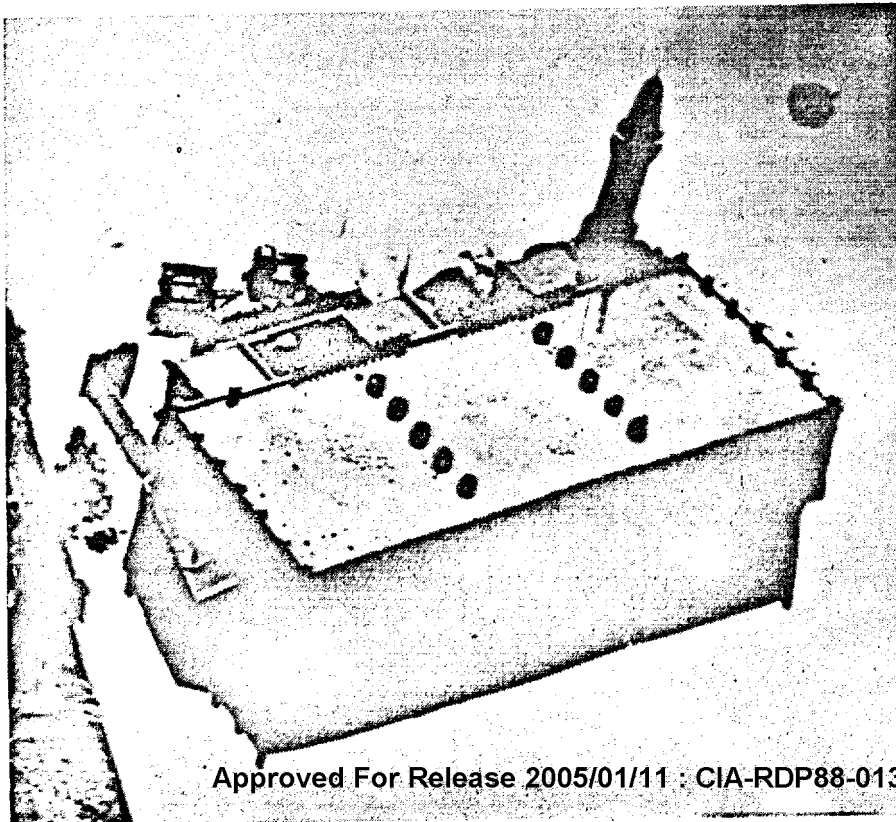


Present strategic picture in the Middle East is depicted on map. Shaded portion is territory occupied by Israel since the Six Day War. Egypt and Syria have increased border pressure on Israel since the Soviet Union took over Egypt's internal air defense. Soviet pilots are flying MiG-21J interceptors from the six sites marked by hammer and sickle. Shelters for the SA-3 Goa missile are being built along the west bank of the Suez Canal. Egyptian air force has attacked Israeli positions in the Sinai. Trees and fields (below) are used to camouflage an aircraft shelter. Anti-aircraft pieces (arrows) are on roof. Wells are used to guide wheels of the aircraft through the narrow shelter opening.





Tiered reinforced concrete construction is used on these two hardened aircraft shelters (above) in Egypt. Three sides and the top probably will be protected further by sand. Another aircraft shelter (below) is disguised as a Moslem mosque. About 450 single- and double-bay shelters are being built in Egypt to protect aircraft from Israeli air attacks.



Qatar, Kuwait, Muscat and Oman, and the Trucial states open to Soviet incursions.

These developments are evidence to some western observers that land-based military airpower is the real strategic key to the Soviet Middle East intervention. To Israeli planners, the speed at which Russia is moving means the price Egypt is paying to the Soviets for military and economic aid is the control of the Suez Canal.

With Soviet control of the Suez, a direct confrontation between Russia and Israel will be unavoidable if Israel continues its basic policy of holding the Sinai territory it captured in the 1967 war. A critical aspect of Israeli strategy is to pin the enemy down along a 15-mi. strip behind the Suez cease-fire line to prevent an Arab buildup for retaking the Sinai (AW&ST May 11, p. 18).

At this point, Israel appears willing to allow the Soviets to defend enclaves in Egypt's interior, but believes its existence depends on maintaining the Sinai as a buffer zone. Doubtless, both sides will probe the other to determine how far each is willing to go in the event of exploding the area into a general war.